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Managing and translating knowledge to improve population health

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Managing and translating knowledge to improve population health

Abstract

The articles in this issue of *Frontiers in Public Health Services and Systems Research* look at a variety of ways in which public health, clinical practice, and their private sector partners build and deploy knowledge in workplaces and communities for purposes ranging from strategic prioritization to program evaluation to health promotion. Whether procuring data from organizations or individuals, ensuring that these data are analyzed in ways that contribute to process development and implementation, or sharing the resulting findings with external audiences to inform policies and behaviors, those tasked with improving population health outcomes encounter frequent opportunities to use information for maximum impact.

Keywords

Commentary, knowledge, public health, health promotion, population health, program evaluation

Cover Page Footnote

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From health departments to medical practices to private businesses and nonprofits, organizations rely on data to drive key decisions. When these decisions affect employee or community health, it is imperative that the information sources are accurate, the interpretations thoughtful, and the dissemination both targeted and effective. Thus, how public health organizations and their research partners generate, evaluate, integrate, apply, and share knowledge has tremendous implications for strategic planning, resource allocation, and evaluation efforts geared toward improving population health.

The articles in this issue of *Frontiers in Public Health Services and Systems Research*^{1–6} look at a variety of ways in which public health, clinical practice, and their private sector partners build and deploy knowledge in workplaces and communities for purposes ranging from strategic prioritization to program evaluation to health promotion. Whether procuring data from organizations or individuals, ensuring that these data are analyzed in ways that contribute to process development and implementation, or sharing the resulting findings with external audiences to inform policies and behaviors, those tasked with improving population health outcomes encounter frequent opportunities to use information for maximum impact. The six articles that follow address key and distinct areas of importance related to increasing, improving, understanding, and deploying available information:

- With social media platforms providing new and evolving opportunities for public health to engage communities and individuals around prevention and health promotion, Trivedi et al.¹ take some initial steps to build the evidence base, looking specifically at when and how local health departments are deploying Facebook to engage stakeholders.
- Through an examination of environmental health service costs among a sample of North Carolina local health departments, Singh and colleagues² identify data gaps and opportunities to better elucidate the cost and value of public health services.
- Public health nurses who engage community groups need community-centered data to assess and improve their programming and activities; to help address this information need, Issel, Lurie, and Bekemeier³ have developed and piloted a *Population-Patient Satisfaction Survey*, which they posit can be easily administered to help guide quality improvement efforts.
- Synthesizing the knowledge base on workplace wellness initiatives, Pronk⁴ proposes a set of Best Practices for organizations that are designing programs targeted to improving employee health.
- Recognizing data gaps and improving data-collection opportunities are goals of Birkhead and colleagues,⁵ who examine the existing literature and argue that the public health community, electronic health records (EHR) vendors, clinical practitioners, and policymakers should better engage each other to optimize EHR utility for better population health surveillance.

- Ensuring the complementarity of processes by which internal organizational data are gathered, used, and evaluated is key to the discussion by Beitsch et al.,⁶ who support thoughtful, multi-level alignment of quality improvement (QI) and performance management (PM) processes undertaken by health departments.

Effectively acquiring, managing, and utilizing data is essential for optimizing decision-making. As illustrated by the articles in this issue of *Frontiers in PHSSR*, public health services and systems researchers are leading the charge, working to understand and refine informational processes and pathways to support evidence-based decisions that can improve population health.

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